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New Business Helps Wealthy Hold Onto Self-Importance in Modern World

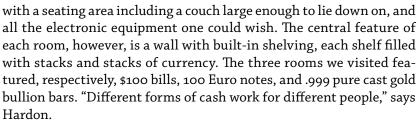
We recently got a special tour of a new venture on Madison Avenue that has been causing quite a stir. The business is called Mammonary Springs Wellness Center. Because Mammonary Springs is secretive to the extreme, a number of far-fetched rumors have bloomed—ranging from the suggestion that it provides a fountain of youth-like treatment to the insinuation that it is simply a high-end brothel. In truth, however, it is dedicated to treating wealthy individuals who have lost their sense of self-importance.

The facility has no public sign, and it occupies floors six through nine in a mixed commercial and residential high-rise. We can't give an exact location or description due to security concerns that will become evident as you read on. To enter the space, you must pass three security checkpoints and a vault-like armor-plated door.

"Many of our clients arrive in a sad state," says Rich Hardon, the president of Mammonary Springs, who agreed to show us around his establishment in order to dispel some of the "insidious" rumors about his enterprise. "It would break your heart if you saw them. They're often overcome with nervousness and confusion that normal people just can't know. I've seen billionaires—I can't name names, you understand—but, billionaires so confused when they come in that they're kind to the desk clerk and chummy with the waitstaff. Sadly, this is happening more and more these days."

What is causing this epidemic of self-effacement among the 1%? According to Hardon, the problem lies in the nature of money today. So much business is conducted virtually—from professional deals to personal purchases—that a wealthy person may not see a stack of cash of more than a few tens of thousands of dollars more than once or twice a year. Academic research has established that money has strong psychological effects on people, and Hardon says that knowing you are wealthy but not seeing the physical proof of it in the form of cold, hard cash can create a psychic schism, bringing about self-doubt and a variety of neurotic symptoms. "Imagine you are a serial entrepreneur. You own hundreds of millions in stock options in various companies and other investments. You may move huge sums, millions and millions, from, say, the Caymans to Macau, but you never touch it. You never get the deep psychological reassurance that your wealth exists."

Mammonary Springs allows a select clientele to spend time in the presence of vast amounts of cash or commodity metals; it's sort of like a fractional time-share for physical money. Hardon showed us three of the facility's nine recovery rooms. Each is comfortably appointed,



Hardon would not tell us the total specie they have on the premises, but our rough estimate comes out to at least \$180 million. Similarly, Mammonary Springs would not reveal what they charge clients for their services. Hardon insists that "hundreds" of wealthy clients are happy to pay.

Clients can spend between 20 minutes and two hours in the recovery rooms. Their progress is closely monitored by a team of psychologists and other care providers. Hardon says that most clients start with an intense treatment regimen and then taper to a single weekly visit as they "regain their sense that, yes, they really are better than other people."

Hardon described plans to expand his business, perhaps through franchises in other global metropolises or with a custom perfume or line of haute couture. However, he insisted that his greatest satisfaction is always in seeing first-hand the great good Mammonary Springs does. "There's no feeling better than seeing an oil heir who once crept in here, now strut in, shout at the staff for his key card, and then complain to me about how the whole place could be run better. Or say I have to tell a client that the room they want is already booked, and they bark, 'Don't you know who I am?!' Then I know it's all been worth it."

News from All Over

- Business advocacy groups call for America's courts to be privatized, saving local, state, and federal governments vast amounts of money. Under their plan, businesses can opt into more efficient "b-courts" that they fund and operate themselves. According to one supporter: "We all know that what you get for free is just crap. Justice can't be free any longer. This is America—justice should be bought and paid for."
- At a gala dinner in downtown Duncastle, the City Literary Society presented awards to the winners of its One-Word Story Contest. The winner for fiction was Hilde Brown with "Yes!" Norman D'Press won in the nonfiction category with "No!"
- The Reverend Johnny Gawn has trademarked the word "fornicate," claiming to represent its original author, God, and plans to collect royalties for its use. He says, "The word should be stricken from the language. But if people must use it—and worse, commit it it should give greater glory (and revenues) to God."

Parents Use Big Data to Engage More Meaningfully with Children

Arthur Igwana loves his kids, but he says his many work commitments make it difficult to spend as much time with them as he would like. So last Christmas, his wife's gift to him was a yearlong contract with Perennial Systems Integration, a data mining company that services major retailers to enhance their customer interactions. More and more, families like the Igwanas are using Perennial to kick up the level of quality in the limited time that fathers and mothers get to spend with their children.

Mom and gift-giver Muriel Igwana says that, in just a few months, Perennial has bolstered Arthur's understanding of their children, and improved their family life overall. "From something as simple as Arthur not mixing up the kids' names, to being able to comment meaningfully about a lacrosse game he was unable to attend, they've strengthened our family's bonding immensely."

The Igwana family lives in Greenwich, Connecticut, with Arthur commuting daily into Manhattan, where he works as a managing director at a private banking firm. Muriel's philanthropic and social commitments keep her busy, as well, especially in the crucial evening hours when the kids are out of school. "Before Perennial and their formidable computing power, I didn't fully appreciate just how broad our kids' networks were, or how angry and unsatisfied they and their little friends were. Now I have all the information I need with just a couple of clicks."

When Arthur and Muriel's son

Trevor tweets that Arthur is "all butthurt" over something Trevor said or did, the quants at Perennial dig deep, across years' worth of Trevor's postings, to determine just how serious, comparatively, the new remark is.

Perennial's CEO Bix Dungerson says analysis is the key. "With the huge data sets we have at our command, once we've processed their salient information our deep-thinking analysts can gain a real understanding of a child's level of resentment, anger, or happiness, and counsel parents how best to deal with these things. In the case of the Igwana family, when sons Trevor or Mike share that their dad is being 'a complete asshole' we can measure that against the times they've said he's being 'an asshole' or 'a total dick' and really suss out the deeper differences."

Each night at 11:30 pm and each day at 5 am, 10 am, and 4 pm, client parents receive a one-line summary of what their kids have posted on the internet. Spreadsheets, graphs, and other more

Aginghacks Life Tips from the 40+

- The secret to having a flat belly in middle age: lie on your back.
- One key to a happy marriage is to choose the right times to be stupid.
- To ensure your loved ones speak fondly of you after you pass, don't die on the same day as someone famous.
- If you do something and you feel guilty about it, tell your children not to do it.
- One benefit to being unlikeable is that, when leaving a party, you never worry that people will miss you.
- Sometimes there's something refreshing about hitting rock bottom.
 You still have that to look forward to.



in-depth materials are easily accessed if parents wish. "I can look at it for ten or fifteen seconds while I'm dealing with work things and get the whole picture," says Arthur. Parents also receive monthly and quarterly trend reports. For a premium fee, Perennial will gain access to children's phone records and track their texts.

Dungerson says that it's that combination of the big picture and miniscule detail that Perennial delivers: "We can tell parents the story of their children's lives."

FRONTIERS OF KNOWLEDGE Museum Damaged by Outraged Patrons

Several windows were broken and five original artworks sustained "significant, possibly irreparable damage," when a riot broke out after a constituents' meeting at the Golga Gallery, the art museum of Wye Sprite University. The Duncastle police also report that two people were taken to the university hospital for treatment—one a 68-yearold professor emeritus who sustained a fractured hand while allegedly punching a hole in an abstract expressionist canvas; the other a 42-year-old homemaker and philanthropist who threw out her back while attempting to push over a sculpture that turned out to be welded to the floor.

The fracas ironically grew out of an effort to placate disgruntled museum patrons and donors. According to several witness accounts, passions rose and eventually boiled over as the museum's executive director, Herman Liftskid, tried to explain why he had agreed to participate in a study that many patrons felt made them look like fools. Anger had been rising for several weeks, since the study, which looked at ideas of originality and value among art viewers, was reported in the local media and on a number of art blogs. The open meeting followed apologies from Mr. Liftskid in the form of a letter to the *Duncastle Inquirer* and a video posted to the gallery's YouTube channel that failed to appease incensed museumgoers.

The controversial study was run by Professor Arturo Callado, from the university's psychology department, and Professor Mary Gingham, from the art history department. With the cooperation of Mr. Liftskid, over the course of a year, Callado and Gingham replaced selected paintings in the museum with hand-painted replicas, and then used cameras above the paintings to observe how patrons discussed and interacted with the art. The Golga Gallery is particularly known for its "Three Little Treasures," paintings by Rembrandt, Manet, and Van Gogh that draw visitors from all over the world and are cherished by the museum's local supporters and friends. The fact that these three works were included in the study became the flashpoint. In the first phase of the study, the researchers rotated the real paintings with replicas unbeknownst to visitors. They noted no significant differences between the comments made about originals and replicas. "People offered the same banalities of appreciation, almost verbatim, especially males accompanying young females," the researchers reported.

After observing the high frequency with which people photographed themselves and their companions in front of the Three Little Treasures. the researchers created another test. They put replicas in the place of the real paintings. Then they hung the real paintings in a nearby hallway. They then posted a sign beside the replicas, which appeared to be real, that said, "In the interest of allowing all visitors to view the paintings, please take any photos near the replicas found in the hallway." Guards were instructed to direct people to the apparent replicas if they had a camera but not to punish those who disregarded the suggestion.

Over the course of two full months, the researchers found that 87,000 people took photos in front of the replicas they thought were real, while only 28 people took photos in front of the real paintings, which were labeled replicas.

In their paper, Callado and Gingham interpret their findings as showing that people have a longing for genuine and inimitable experience, as opposed to the inundation of the virtual, the copyable, the mass-produced, that is so prevalent today. But at the same time, people do not know the genuine when they see it. They rely on the dictation of others, especially an authority like a museum, in order to know when they are having a genuine experience. The researchers' conclusion: "When we look closely at the findings of this 12-month, rigorous experiment, we must conclude that authority plays a dominant role in defining individuals' experience, even in a sphere often thought to be one of intimate exchange by those of a romantic temper. The clear implication is that originality and genuineness are actually socially mediated experiences, while direct experience is entirely an illusion created by institutional context. More attention in the museum studies field needs to be directed to this question of how authority determines experience."

Callado and Gingham wouldn't speak to The Stoneslide Corrective, but a colleague of theirs from the Wye Sprite psychology department commented on condition we not give his name because he said he frequently attends cocktail parties with many of the rioters. "This is very, very original work. And like all paradigm-shifting acts of thought, it is perceived as subversive and threatening and thus provokes a violent response. That is the way of these things. But in a world of reality TV, superabundance of cultural production, countermovements such as the slow food movement, and the opinion-on-demand availability of the blogosphere and Twitter, how can you say we don't need this work?"

Callado and Gingham published their findings online as a working paper in February 2015. Within a week the research was summarized in the humanities blog of the *Higher Ed Tribune* and from there it was picked up on numerous blogs and on Twitter. A conservative commentator on Foxnews.com labeled it proof that "liberal elites don't know their elbows from their watercolors." Local News Eyewitness on Your Side Power Channel Four picked up the story on March 12, and that is how it became widely known in the Duncastle community and ultimately became fuel for civic disorder.

A sense of the community response can be found in the comments section of the Power Channel Four website. One commenter reflected the opinions of many when he wrote, "I'd call it a breach of contract, not research: we went to the museum, in many cases we donated significant funds, under the promise that we were seeing genuine artwork, and they pulled a fast one on us." The Three Treasures came up frequently. "I cried when I read this. I've been to see the Treasures at least a half-dozen times since they had those dumb photo stations up. So all that time they were laughing at me? I feel like they killed a relative or a dear friend."

Soon, museum friends started a petition to remove executive director Liftskid. Residents protested outside the museum, carrying signs with images of the Three Treasures and the caption "Ain't nothing like the real thing!" Major donors to the museum stopped giving and in at least two cases demanded money back, saying the museum had betrayed their trust. Callado and Gingham were reportedly asked to study abroad until the furor died down.

In the midst of this tumult, Liftskid called an open meeting to explain the museum's actions and address concerns. Though the meeting was closed to the press, this account is based on numerous eyewitness reports.

About seventy-five museum patrons gathered in the Grand Foyer, just as the sun set, spraying a fountain of rose and orange outside the floor-to-ceiling windows, like a reflection of a neon Jackson Pollock. The room was set up as if for a cocktail party, with several standing tables, wine, and hors d'oeuvres. But the people in the room were tense and quiet, the hors d'oevres and wine untouched.

Liftskid emerged from the administrative office suite. He seemed to consider trying to mingle, but instead sensed the tone of the room and went to a microphone that had been prepared for him and called, "Hello," a few times. He was dressed in a pinstriped suit and wore French cuffs and polished shoes. "Hello," he said again, though the room was already quiet, genuinely eager to hear what he had to say.

Liftskid thanked people for coming, and then said, "I know there have been questions about what happened here at the Golga, the reasons, the intentions. I am looking forward to answering those questions; I think you will see that the museum has been consistently acting in your interests." He explained how he'd been approached by the researchers and developed the methodology along with them. He insisted that recordings be kept anonymous, he said, smiling as if he expected everyone to be on his side because of this. "Being part of a great university, what we do is advance knowledge, of course."

"What you did was lie!" someone called out.

"In the interest of a higher good," Liftskid replied. "Sometimes truth is complicated."

"Do you think we're fools? I own my own business, you know," said another heckler.

"You could think of it that you're lucky to be part of this very helpful experiment—"

"Are we lab mice?" a woman shrieked. "Is that why you serve us this supermarket brie?"

And that was the moment when disputatious words turned to disorderly acts. An unidentified man wearing a cardigan ran to the Cassat displayed on the south wall, calling, "Why should we believe anything you say. These are all fakes!" He tried to tear the frame off the wall, but instead ended up hanging from it and dangling there a moment. But his audacious attack rallied the other enraged museumgoers. A heavyset woman in a beaded dress rushed Liftskid with her purse raised over her head. Liftskid for the first time in his life ran away from the offer of a cash donation.

Simultaneously, several other patrons attacked the art all around them. According to reports, a phalanx of patrons was attempting to break through the locked door to the permanent collection when the police, who had been stationed outside to keep press away, saw what was happening through the windows and charged in with pepper spray and a bullhorn. Police are still investigating and expect to bring charges soon.

In Briefs

 If you want to look slimmer, stand next to an overweight dog.
Scientists from Gulf Isthmus
University found that people standing next to obese dogs were rated more attractive and intelligent than those standing next to svelte canines.

• A study in *The Journal of Longitudinal Studies* finds that fans of R.E.M. earn \$4,400 more, annually, than fans of The Replacements. However, Replacements fans exhibit far greater levels of happiness, shaped by what the authors called "their ability to see everything that is bad, and good, be aware of all that, and realize that life is what obtains, not what should obtain. This realism... fosters a joyful, wry humor."

• New online security questions based on your most shameful memories are projected to reduce cybercrime by as much as 75%. The questions draw on memories that are at once unforgettable and so embarrassing you would never share them with another human. An example: "Which boyfriend/girlfriend first told you that you were a disappointment?"



Clark Van Steedt, ceo of gorgons bluff

Of the many beautiful products manufactured and distributed throughout the United States by my company, Gorgons Bluff, I believe the humble mounting pin best expresses the essence of the Gorgons Bluff lifestyle.

O confess I love the feeling of a taut steel pin against the pads of my fingers. And I am biased by the lifelong love affair I 人 have had with these supple and elegant instruments. But I think anyone could be convinced that the mounting pin is the metaphorical point on which we can best catch those moments of fleeting beauty that are otherwise lost in the confounding morass of the natural world. When we as devoted collectors-and everyone who works at Gorgons Bluff uses our products religiously-impale the thorax of a Parnassius apollo and place the tip of the pin into a cork board, we are acting out a ritual taught to us by fathers and forebears, we are invoking the great explorers and naturalists who summoned our scientific mindset into being from a world long thought barbarous and inimical, and we are genuflecting ourselves to the perfection of form that can be achieved in the shellacked carapaces of class insecta but always seems beyond our bumbling fingers.

Any collector knows you cannot use a mounting pin without paying close, detailed, and sustained attention to what you are doing. The act of pinning is the act of observing, of setting your mind with the focused sharpness of the pin itself to no task other than pure observation of the form of nature. And to observe like that is to love. A love that is a crucifixion because it opens us to experience of the sublime.

No one loves life more than those who pin with Gorgons Bluff. The collectors who choose Gorgons Bluff pins also show their devotion to the highest quality manufacturing techniques and to bringing attention to detail and appreciation of excellence to every action they take.

My great-grandfather arrived in this country with little more than the pins in his pocket, the train fare to carry him to the Black Hills, and the insatiable desire to asphyxiate and mount insects-especially the various coleoptera, his true love. But he had a dream in his heart, and that dream became the small peddler's cart that he wheeled to a street corner with a view of our namesake bluffs in the distance. In time he was able to lease a 720-squarefoot retail space with foot traffic at reasonable rates. My grandfather and father increased our manufacturing capacity and built a distribution network through naturalist supply outlets.

Today we are taking Gorgons Bluff beyond the world of knowledgeable collectors to consumers with more limited horizons. We offer a range of lifestyle products that will help you feel some of what the true collector does. When you see our pin desk ornaments and subtle wardrobe accessories, you will love the natural world in a new way. But even as we move into new markets, everything we do is about that moment of ecstasy when you have what seems all life and all understanding transfixed on your pin.

That's why I and my company are so proud to sponsor this issue of *The Stoneslide Corrective* and its collection of fiction and literary observation as honed and gleaming as the ruby shell of *Lilioceris lilii*.

Clark

Gorgons Bluff products available today for "urban" naturalists and enthusiasts

- Gold leaf monogrammed 3-in-1 magniscopes
- Rain-proof, Neo-vellum[™] pocket notebooks
- Dissecting kits for ocelots, wallabies, capuchin monkeys, and family dogs (small, medium, and large)
- Electric tick nippers
- Pith helmets, with facial netting available in mauve, teal, sunset, and violet
- Hatchets
- Sling-It[™] tree tents and hammocks, adaptable to forest and most office cubicle walls
- Designer entomological collecting jars, with 24 applications of ethyl acetate
- Deluxe insect display cases, with wall mounts and auto adapter
- Mounting pins, sizes 0-9
- Mounting pin jacket or sweater clasp
- Mounting pin desk ornament, red or orange base
- LilNaturalist[™] kids' collecting kits, with pins, jars, and ethyl acetate (some parental supervision required)

- Fine-bore faux ivory combs for collecting insect specimens right off the family pet
- Praying mantis and black widow decoys with spring trap collecting box
- 48-piece connoisseur's set of mammalian urines and musks, including applicator and silk blindfold
- 24-piece collection of ethically and sustainably harvested sea sponges (Porifera) for kitchen and bath
- Field bar, with shatter-preventing compartments for bottles, glasses, and stemware; options include maple, mahogany, or birch bar top; zinc top; acrylic-sealed copper top; inlays available
- Bird decoys, Andean condor and scarlet ibis
- Travelers trunks in classic (5x6x3) and onthe-go (4x4x2) sizes
- Haute Camp[™] silk undershirts and long underwear
- ForagersDream[™] trowels, knives, pouches, knapsacks, compasses





STRIPPED

BY MARK WISNIEWSKI

SOMETIMES I THINK EVERYONE KNOWS.

Sometimes I think my parents have been cheating on each other throughout my whole life and everyone's known except me.

For most of my life, all I had was suspicion. But then I came home one afternoon and checked our answering machine, and it was blinking so I pushed what I thought was PLAY, but the machine was brand new and I'd pushed the wrong button—or my dad had when he'd been in our house having sex with the only girl I've ever been in love with.

Whose name by the way was Kat. Anyway, recorded maybe an hour earlier and now being replayed for my ears only was a conversation between her and my dad, and it obviously wasn't a phone call but instead an in-person conversation because you could hear our first floor toilet flushing in the background, with its desperate sucking sound at the end. After that sound you could hear Kat, apparently leaving the bathroom, saying "Do I need to leave?" to my dad, then my dad pausing by clearing his throat.

It occurred to me just after I heard this recording the first time, moments before I saved it on my cell and deleted it from the answering machine, that my dad, in his post-sex-with-Kat daze, had been checking messages as Kat "freshened up" or whatever adults call it, and in doing so he'd accidentally pushed the message-to-self button.

And it occurs to me now that my whole life has been like this. I mean: odd. I mean accidents caused by my absent-minded father, or maybe it's pure self-absorption on his part. There are also plenty of angry things blurted by my rarely home mother, and it also occurs to me now that if she, my mom, weren't gone from our house so often, she'd blurt more angry things than she does.

Mostly it now occurs to me that, since my dad is such an obvious jackass, I've been going through a kind of adjustment period in which I'm becoming an adult with little or no association with him or my mom or the only woman I've ever been in love with, not to mention this adjustment period has lasted long enough that I've needed—as my school's counseling center's *Prepare for Trauma* booklet calls it—"support" from a guy named Craig-Jug.

Craig-Jug is called Craig-Jug because he juggles and his first name is Craig. He also has this godfather who plays hoops for A&M, and CraigJug always hits this godfather up for A&M hoops jerseys because Craig-Jug hopes to sell them, and the godfather sends them because he takes being a godfather very seriously. The point I've tried to make, to Craig-Jug I mean, is that he might as well donate those jerseys to Goodwill because A&M fans don't care about hoops—to them it's all about football.

Why, you might ask, am I bothering to explain the worthlessness of A&M hoops jerseys? Because it shows how Craig-Jug, being a little slow on the uptake about how the real world works, might not be the best advisor for me when it comes to how to handle this whole Kat-had-sex-with-mydad problem. But see, now that Kat and I guy. The word tends to be up there in his vocab. Anyway he keeps juggling the four bananas, and I frown at the A&M jersey he's got on to remind him I think he tends to be a little wacky, so he goes:

"Let me put this in no-nonsense terms. I know where we can see professional strippers get naked."

To which I say nothing, since I'm caught by surprise.

"Absolutely guaranteed," he says.

"But you know I'm opposed to fake ID usage."

"None needed, bro." "For either of us?" "Correct."

"Plus no spying through a window," I

no longer talk to each other, Craig-Jug is the only person my age who wants to hang with me.

Anyway a few weeks after I heard that recording on my

parents' answering machine, Craig-Jug and I were in his basement while his parents and sister were out getting Mister Misties, and he was juggling four bananas (the banana, by the way, not an easy thing to juggle if you ask Craig-Jug), and he announces that he has this idea about how guys our age could, as he puts it, "maximize masturbatory pleasure."

"Not sure I'm interested," is how I answer him.

"Let's get something straight, bro," he says. "I'm not talking about jacking off together. I mean jacking off alone. Which basically is the only way to do it, since if there's someone in the room with you, it's basically the equivalent of having sex."

Craig-Jug, by the way, is a "basically"

"Let's get something straight, bro," he says. "I'm not talking about jacking off together. I mean jacking off alone." say, and a banana falls to the floor.

Craig-Jug keeps juggling, drops to one knee, gropes, then has all four bananas going again.

"Again none

needed," he says. "And you've got to admit, man, that if you could watch an actual stripper do a professional striptease, your subsequent time alone with yourself would probably feel supercharged."

"Possibly," I say, but I think: Why does he want me to see the stripper?

"And I'm not talking about having some classmate phoning you videos of herself topless," he says, and here he's referring to Kat, whose name still kind of stings.

"Keep talking," I say.

"Plus if you got to see *several* strippers?"

Craig-Jug grins and juggles on. It's like he wants something to click in my brain. But Craig-Jug isn't into brains. For him it's all about juggling. And now, as he stares at me while waiting for an answer, he doesn't as much as glance at a single banana. He's been working on that lately: never glancing at what he juggles, since this indicator of skill, he believes, is the key to juggling professionally for a circus that offers comprehensive health insurance.

Finally he drops a banana, catches the others, and holds them.

"Well?" I say.

"All we need is a car," he says.

"Plus you need a license, Craig-Jug."

"We already know that, bro. So the deal is: you get your pop's wheels and drive. In exchange for my idea." He shrugs. "Everyone wins."

"The strippers win?" I ask.

He holds out his hands, each now supporting two sedentary bananas.

"Dude," he says. "Strippers always win."

SO CRAIG-JUG, I was sure, would wind up in the entertainment industry. Maybe he'd first need to bag groceries, but that didn't matter. What mattered was I was thinking less about my dad, which might lead me to care less about Kat. Of course she'd probably need to change her name for me to forget her—as things stood now, when I heard the word "cat" I didn't first think of an animal.

Then Craig-Jug and I approached my parents' garage, which is directly under my parents' bedroom. The big garage door was open, my mom's car inside.

"Bro, your ma's home."

And Craig-Jug said this as if he knew my mom stayed late at her job—and I'd never told him this, so how had he known? From rumors? Had his parents heard something? Were there rumors out there because my mom was screwing her boss?

I walked inside my house alone: Craig-

Jug knew to stay put. The shower upstairs was running. My mom showered before work and after. My dad had once complained about how she'd come home from work smelling like cigarettes, and all she'd done was shrug. My dad had then just glanced across the living room.

But now, every day, the shower after work.

And here was my mom's purse, on my parents' bed. I knew it was unfair—or something—to look in a woman's purse. Women's purses were sacred, or so Kat had said. I reached into my mom's for her car keys, averting my eyes, but not soon enough, from a condom three-pack and a loose cigarette. I was bad. I was a bad spy who stunk at common courtesy: my mom had said we family members needed to be nicer to each other than common courtesy demanded. Finally I found the keys, in a corner with a piece of Wrigley's that was unchewed but barely wrapped. Craig-Jug loved gum but screw that.

Out in the garage, I motioned for him to get in on the passenger side of my mom's car. It was as if I could hear her footfalls approaching the small wooden door to the house. She'd open it in only her towel and Craig-Jug would see, and what would come of *that*?

But Craig-Jug was now seatbelted in. Albeit staring at the small wooden door. Then I was in, and I fired the ignition and backed up and had it in drive.

"Cell phones off," Craig-Jug said.

"Which way."

"Take a left."

I did. I didn't care. I turned off my cell before Craig-Jug found his. I followed his directions through three towns east, which meant we were well into farmland.

"And cell phones in the glove box," he said.

"Why?"

You've reached the end of your free sample.

Please consider purchasing a copy of The **Stoneslide Corrective No. 1.**

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Thank you for reading.